

Testimony of Ali Al-Ahmed

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you about the State Departments 2005 Human Rights Report and the situation in the Middle East in the area of human rights. I will review the overall condition of the region with particular attention to my home country of Saudi Arabia and then discuss the persecution of my family by the Saudi government as a result of my work here in the United States.

❖ Darfur

The largest human rights catastrophe in the region is in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of Sunni Muslim African blacks are being massacred at the hands of a Sunni Arab government. Supporting this crime are other Arab political and religious leaders who revile the US and the West at every chance they get, but who are tacitly approving the murdered and rape of women, man, and children in Darfur, through their silence and media blackout.

Darfur has not been the exception, but rather the rule. There are many non-Arab cultures and peoples that are persecuted in the region over their faith or ethnicity. They include Copts, Kurds, Africans, Neopians, Amazigh, Sharkas, Armenian, Persian, Indians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and many others. The same goes for non-Muslims that include Jews, Christians, Azydees, Sabane, Druze, and others that are persecuted and even murdered for their faith.

In addition to persecuting non Arabs and non Muslims, Muslim religious and ethnic minorities have suffered the brunt of totalitarian regimes and their extremist allies. Today, the main victims of terrorism in the Middle East are the Shia Arabs and Sunni Muslim Africans. Most Arab governments and certain Satellite Stations have made their prime goal to wage a war against the Shia Muslims in the Middle East, and other religious and ethnic minorities.

I will shed light today in the case for the Shia Arabs of the Middle East, who are enduring severe marginalization, intimidation, and straight out genocidal campaign. In Iraq they are murdered by the dozens every day, with the support of neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Syria.

- ❖ **In Bahrain**, the majority of the population is Shia Arabs who are marginalized politically, economically, academically and religiously. They are deprived from even assuming the position of a police officer.

❖ UAE

The United Arab Emirates continues to be the only country in the world that has never seen any form of elections. The practice of using poor expatriate children as camel jockeys for the entertainment of the rich and powerful continues. The UAE practices religious discrimination against Shia Arabs in employment.

❖ **Qatar: the Muraa Tribe**

The Qatari government stripped six thousand indigenous Sunni Arabs, of the Murra tribe from their citizenship, as a collective banishment. They lost their jobs, any public benefits. The Qatari government also discriminates against its Shia citizens who make up 15% of the population. They are banned from government TV and Radio, as well as from establishing financial institutions.

❖ **Shia Arabs**

In Saudi Arabia, the Shia, make up about 20 percent of the population, and are treated as second class citizens. Unlike Sunni Arab minority in Iraq, the Shia Arab minority in Saudi Arabia plays no political role, and is under a total media shutout from government TV and radio. Shia Arabs are banned from leading a single government agency. They are officially banned from a long list of official positions that include the following: diplomats, ministers, judges, military officer, religion teacher, and many other positions. In fact, the Saudi embassy in Washington is a stark example of that policy. It has never employed a single Shia in its entire history.

The sectarian government of Saudi Arabia is the most anti-Shia government in the world. A recent case took place in Saudi Arabia where a Saudi judge denied Mr. Alaa Amin al-Saada from Safwa to act as a witness in the marriage of his Sunni employer's daughter. The reason was that he was a Shia Muslim deemed by the Saudi government to be a heretic. Mr. al-Saada complained to the Minister of Justice and did not receive an answer.

Another example is Professor Mohamed Al-Hassan from Riyadh, who has been the target of the Saudi government persecution for the past four years. He has been threatened with death, and banned from work and travel. The State Department has declined to publish Dr. Al-Hassan's name in their annual report, a policy they have not used with other reformer.

❖ **Hijaz**

The people of the Hejaz, are mostly Sunni Muslim who suffer under the Saudi government. Their unique cultural heritage and religious understanding have been assailed by the Saudi government. Hundreds of Islamic landmarks in the holy cities of Makkah and Madina, including the houses of Prophet Muhammad are being permanently destroyed as part of a government war against the Hijazi people and their culture. These historical sites are being destroyed in the absence of any outrage by Muslims. The campaign even reached Hejazi music. Last December the Saudi Interior Minister ordered the closing of a Hejazi Music museum.

The Saudi partial elections has been discriminatory, and violated international standards. Women were barred from voting and running to office. These elections should have elicited international condemnation, as they have banned women. They would have

received condemnation, and called sectarian, and racist if they had excluded Shia or blacks.

❖ **My Family**

My work, including speaking before you today, has caused a great deal of hardship for my family at the hands of the oppressive Saudi government. My mother, Malika al-Habib who is 67 years old and in need of urgent medical care in the United States has not been allowed to leave the country with my oldest brother, Abdullah. Abdullah needs to travel to bring our mother for treatment in the United States, where she needs back surgery as soon as possible, and other medical procedures following a car accident last November. She is covered under his insurance, which cannot be active unless he is present with her.

Abdullah was imprisoned in July 1999 for 19 months and later with his family banned from foreign travel to date. In 2001, the government arrested my younger brother Kamil.

Kamil has been in prison for five years now without any charge nor allowed legal representation, after the government denied him his right to a lawyer. Kamil was tortured, by Saudi officials in Dammam and years of his youthful life have been lost.

The United States State Department has intentionally kept the case of my brothers off the annual human rights report. The case of Kamil and Abdullah has been provided to them in my many letters to President Bush, Secretary Powell and Rice, Ambassador Robert Jordan and James Oberwetter, and to the directors and staff of Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have also reported the case several times. In fact, in 2004, Congresswomen Rose-Latiopin wrote to the State Department on the case of Kamil. I consider the State Department negligent in this matter.

The Saudi embassy confiscated my passport in March 2004, after I applied for a renewal. They have refused to give me one reason for the confiscation. The State department is fully aware of the issue from the beginning. I remain without a passport since then.

❖ **American in Saudi Arabia**

There are over 35,000 Americans in Saudi Arabia, who are deprived from their religion and basic human rights enjoyed by their Saudi counterparts in the United States. While I can pry inside this building, and buy a Quran anywhere in the US, my American counterparts in Riyadh are not allowed to wear their sacred cross, or gather publicly for Christian service. If Saudis or other Muslims were treated even remotely as bad in America as foreigners are treated in Saudi Arabia there would be major international reaction.

I urge you to investigate the situation of my American counterparts in Saudi Arabia, to ensure their rights to publicly celebrate their religious and national holidays, such as Christmas and the Fourth of July as well as other American national holidays.

I urge you to ask the State department to devote a section in their annual human rights and religious freedom to report on the situation of American communities in Saudi Arabia and other countries around the world.

Thank you for your kind invitation

Ali Al-Ahmed
The Institute for Gulf Affairs
Director